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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TOKYO 000286

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/03/2018

TAGS: PREL EAGR OVIP MARR ZI JA

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR AND VFM YABUNAKA DISCUSS USS BLUE RIDGE, MUGABE, SECRETARY'S VISIT, BEEF

Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer for reasons 1.4 b/d.

Summary

¶1. (C) In a February 1 one-on-one lunch, the Ambassador thanked Vice Foreign Minister Mitoji Yabunaka for his assistance with the USS Blue Ridge's upcoming port call and asked him to reconsider the presence of Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe at the fourth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD IV). The Ambassador and Yabunaka also discussed Secretary Rice's February visit and the way forward on resumption of U.S. beef exports to Japan. End summary.

USS Blue Ridge's Port Call in Otaru

¶2. (C) The Ambassador thanked VFM Yabunaka for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs's (MOFA) assistance in getting a berth for the USS Blue Ridge during its February 7 port call in Otaru City, Hokkaido. Otaru's mayor agreed February 7 to allow the Seventh Fleet flagship to make the port call after MOFA intervened and despite criticism from a local opposition Diet member.

TICAD and Robert Mugabe

¶3. (C) The Ambassador told VFM Yabunaka the United States continues to maintain that Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe should not attend TICAD IV, which takes place May 28-30 in Yokohama. Japan has already issued invitations to all African countries except Somalia (with which it does not have diplomatic relations) and Yabunaka stated several countries, particularly those from southern Africa, had indicated they would not attend TICAD IV if Mugabe is not welcome. That puts Japan in a difficult position, he continued, because Japan has highlighted Africa as a theme for its G-8 presidency and hopes to fold the results of TICAD IV into this year's G-8 work. (Note: Japan also wishes to have more participating countries than China did in its last Africa-related summit.)

¶4. (C) Asked if Mugabe's presence would be a problem for the United States, the Ambassador said it would. He told Yabunaka he hopes Japan can find a way not to involve Mugabe in the conference.

Secretary Rice's Visit

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¶5. (C) Yabunaka said Secretary Rice's February 26-27 visit would coincide with the visit of Israel's Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, who will be in Japan February 24-28. Yabunaka also noted a Palestinian visit to Japan will follow in March.

U.S. Beef Exports

¶6. (C) Yabunaka raised the issue of U.S. beef exports to Japan, stating he hopes the United States would cooperate with Japan on a proposal to admit products derived from cattle under 30 months of age. The Ambassador replied Washington is frustrated with the state of discussion on beef and sees the 30-month proposal as promising little progress.

¶7. (C) The problem from the U.S. viewpoint, continued the Ambassador, is the 30-month proposal does not resolve the issue -- it just prolongs the pain. If the 30-month proposal were agreed to, the day after it went into effect the United States would be asking Japan to allow exports of all cuts and all ages of beef. Bilateral friction on the beef issue would not be over.

¶8. (C) The Ambassador asked Yabunaka to focus on resolving the beef issue in one shot and suggested he think along the lines of the proposal PM Fukuda put forward in November. Japan could think, for instance, about asking the Food Safety Commission to consider simultaneously the questions of 30-months and under beef and the OIE standards for all cuts and all ages at the same time. A single response that opened the market to 30-month and under beef and set a date certain for transition to the OIE standards (on the condition that no BSE was detected during the specified period) might be more amenable to Washington. But, the Ambassador stressed even that was not certain because Washington is so frustrated over

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dealing with Japan on this issue.

¶9. (C) The Ambassador told Yabunaka he will be in Washington during the week of February 4 and will discuss the beef issue with USTR Schwab.

SCHIEFFER